M.A.: Erasmus Mundus Master’s in Journalism, Media and Globalization Joint Degree

**Where Freedom Exists, Quality Exists?**
Assessing Journalistic Quality in Sudanese Exile and Local Online News Outlets

**Master’s Thesis**
Author: Farah Amr Mahmoud Bahgat Ahmed

Student ID: 12367664

Supervisor: dhr. dr. A.R.T. Schuck

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Graduate School of Communication
Abstract

Previous research on journalistic quality has primarily focused on Western standards that rely on the role of journalism in Liberal democracies. However, little to no research addressed journalistic quality in exile media, particularly Sudanese, and how it could possibly differ from local media. This study addresses this gap through the assessment of journalistic quality in Sudanese local and exile online news media. A content analysis of news articles (N=300) examined the extent to which Sudanese media fulfilled four established quality standards: diversity, factuality, comprehensiveness, and criticism. Findings show that exile media have an overall higher quality than local media, indicating better journalistic performance given a condition of press freedom, as opposed to oppression and censorship. The results contribute to the discussion on quantifying journalistic quality in a non-Western context, as well as examining the under-researched phenomenon of exile journalism.

Keywords: journalistic quality, exile journalism, local journalism, diversity, factuality, press freedom, democracy
Introduction

In December, 2018, demonstrators took the streets in Sudan to protest against increases in prices that the government had imposed earlier. The economic situation has worsened in Sudan since the separation from South Sudan, as well as the imposed sanctions because Al Bashir’s war crimes (Kirby, 2019). The driving force of the protests was younger generations who were not satisfied with not only the prices, but also corruption and the general atmosphere of oppression, thus, their demands escalated to the ousting of Al Bashir, who had been in power after a military coup over thirty years ago (Baldo & Oette, 2019). Part of this oppression that the demonstrations protested against was directed towards the media. Reports show that Sudan is ranked 175 in the World Press Freedom index of 2019. Security forces arrested about 100 journalists during the crackdown on demonstrations (“Open Season on Journalists”, 2019).

Media have struggled to operate in Sudan for decades amid oppression and armed conflict. As a result, some Sudanese journalists fled Sudan and moved to a safer environment to practice journalism (Elsadig et al., 2018), while others went online to avoid censorship (Afp, 2017). Either way, Sudanese journalists strive to achieve journalistic quality in a challenging and highly oppressive atmosphere.

Scholars have defined journalistic quality through a set of criteria which the media should fulfil. These criteria could be determined through different approaches, depending on the purpose of studying quality.

The purpose of studying journalistic quality is often linked to the ‘greater good’ that journalism can do to society, for instance, examining the relation between quality of investigative journalism and levels of corruption (Lacey & Rosenstiel 2015). Or in a greater context, how better journalistic quality could contribute to better democracy (Spurk et al., 2015; Anderson & Egglestone 2014; Zaller, 2010). Thus, there exists a gap in knowledge when
studi ng journalistic quality in a non-Western democracy, as most literature on democracy is almost exclusively applicable to Western democracies.

The issue that this article addresses is measuring journalistic quality in a non-Western context, to assess how quality can differ when operating in a condition of independence and press freedom (i.e. exile journalism), as contrary to local journalism facing oppression and sometimes censorship. Thus, this paper answers the research question **How does journalistic quality differ in Sudanese outlets inside and outside of Sudan?**

Through operationalizing journalistic quality in a Sudanese context, of particularly four qualities, I conduct a quantitative content analysis of two Sudanese media outlets operating inside Sudan, and two Sudanese outlets operating from Europe to address the research question. Thus, this study contributes to the ongoing discussion on measuring journalistic quality, as well as examining the under-researched phenomenon of exile journalism.

**Theoretical framework**

**Elements of Journalistic Quality**

Some scholars define journalistic quality based on the extent to which journalism fulfills its expected political role (Spurk et al., 2010; Anderson & Egglestone, 2012; Jacobi, 2015), others develop these criteria based on how the public, and/or journalists perceive journalistic quality, which is referred to as a ‘demand approach’ (Lacy, 1989) and is often executed through surveys and interviews.

McQuail (2005) established a handful of values to assess journalistic quality on institutional and content levels. As this article addresses, quality of content, only two criteria of McQuail’s framework are relevant: diversity and objectivity (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015). Diversity is essential to give voice to the voiceless, make sure all parts of society are represented, which results in an overall improvement of the public discussion (McQuail, 1992). Researchers
argue that diversity is an important element of journalistic quality because journalism is responsible of providing accessibility and representation of citizens, activists, officials and other political actors (Hoffman-Riem, 1987; Mukhongo, 2010), as well as social diversity, thus include sources of different genders, social classes, and religions (McQuail, 1992).

Scholars have studied diversity in journalism through different approaches. One approach is analyzing diversity on an institutional level through assessing the diverse backgrounds of editors and journalists in the newsroom (Camauër, 2011). Another approach, which is more relevant to this article, is assessing diversity of the produced content (Carpenter, 2010). McQuail (2005) suggested three main elements of content diversity: diversity of topics, diversity of formats and diversity of opinions.

Since different actors express different opinions, diversity of opinions is related to diversity of sources (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006; Wolfsfeld, 2011). In this context, sources are considered actors who provide perspectives through quotations and statements (Masini & Aelst, 2017).

Another element of diversity is also diversity of topics, its importance is related to the audience needs, as people have different interests, accessibility and representation is also achieved through diversity of topics a news outlet covers (Graber, 2003).

Therefore, there are different categories of diversity within content, it could include frames, ideas or attributions (Voakes et al, 1996), as well as topics and formats. Hoffman-Riem (1987) associated journalistic quality to diversity of journalistic formats, such soft news and hard news, and news and analysis. This also fulfills the audience different interests, and provides the tool to provide accessible and comprehensively news to the public.

Diversity is strongly tied to other standards of journalistic quality, such as accuracy and objectivity, as they are both concerned with the different actors and sources journalists use to
report information. As well as comprehensiveness, for instance, different journalistic formats increase chances of the public gaining better understanding of a given event.

Objectivity has been a debatable concept. McQuail (2005), although he suggests it as an element of assessing journalistic quality, he also acknowledges the drawback of the concept, which lies in the philosophical and anthropological nature of the concept that asks, can humans really be ‘objective’?

Wien (2005) investigates the rise and fall of the concept of objectivity in journalism. She argues that objectivity emerged as a positivist concept in the 19th century, and about a hundred years later, with the rise of modern democracies, journalism took a more critical approach (Wien, 2005).

Nonetheless, Westerdåhl (1983) conceptualized objectivity to have two main elements: factuality and impartiality, the latter is the rather controversial element. McQuail (1992) draws on this conceptualization, in which factuality is a reflection of ‘truth’, which in journalism can be achieved through the amount of facts in a given article, the accuracy of these facts, the extent to which it is informative and the extent to which it is complete.

The first element, factuality, can be achieved when facts are checkable, meaning that anyone has access to verify these facts (McQuail, 1992). Journalists must make sure to attribute the reported facts to the sources from which they reported them and/or provide evidence to their truthfulness in order to achieve checkability.

The extent to which journalism is informative is also essential to provide the public with a better understanding of current affairs. Journalism of high quality not only covers key facts but explains causal relationships of a given event (Anderson & Egglestone, 2012). Studies have conceptualized information as the presence of background information and addressing reason beyond facts (Spurk et al., 2010). Furthermore, Jacobi (2015) includes complexity as a
component of information, which assesses the amount of different issues and actors and how they are connected in a given article (Jacobi, 2015).

For the second element of objectivity, impartiality, McQuail (1998) suggests that scholars assess it based on balance and neutral presentation. Balance could be achieved through the equal presentation of sources and opinions, while neutral presentation is achieved through non-evaluative and non-sensational reporting (McQuail, 1998).

There are limitations to this framework, particularly the non-evaluative element, is that it contradicts one of the main functions of journalism, one that McQuail (1998) himself addresses and considers an indicator of ‘good journalism’ and that is criticism. Moreover, certain levels of sensationalism attract the public and can be engaging (Jacobi, 2015).

Therefore, in this article, I will not consider objectivity in operationalizing the assessment of journalistic quality. Instead, I will consider the truth and information element, with disregard to impartiality.

The importance of these criteria differs through different political and cultural contexts. For instance, in some contexts, public affairs might be favored over geographical relevance; in others, they might be equally important. This is all determined by the approach a researcher takes to determine the role of journalism and the extent to which this role is fulfilled.

For decades, the role of journalism has been determined by the model of democracy in which journalism is produced (Jacobi, 2015), this idea roots back to the notion that better democracy results in better journalism and vice versa, as both perform in an ‘ecosystem’ where the two concepts thrive on the quality of one another (Strömback, 2005).

**Journalism and Democracy**

Societies fall under different models of democracy based on cultural and historical contexts, and these models entail different normative roles for citizens and journalists. For
instance, the role of citizens in a procedural democracy is to elect representatives through voting in elections. Thus, it is essential that citizens are well informed on the candidates for which they vote (Strömback, 2005). Based on this normative function of citizens in a democracy, comes the role of journalism. Journalism is expected to provide sufficient and transparent information to the public about politicians and act as a watchdog, i.e., hold politicians accountable by notifying the public with what they are doing (Strömback, 2005).

In another model of democracy, a participatory one, citizens are expected to be more active, hence they should be better informed and engaged in public discussions, which means that journalism should be more engaging, and could rely on using drama or emotions in coverage, and be more than a watchdog, in other words, journalism should do its best to be attractive to the public (Strömback, 2005).

Studying the quality of BBC’s online news, Anderson and Egglestone (2012) conceptualized journalistic quality based on the role of journalism in participatory democracy (Strömback, 2005). They formulated four main criteria to measure journalistic quality: presence of facts and relevant conjunctions, providing solutions for addressed issues, presenting main consequences of a given event, and providing credible sources of the reported facts (Anderson & Egglestone 2012; pp. 928-929).

Relying on Strömback’s (2005) democracy models is appropriate for the case of Anderson and Egglestone’s (2012) study given the context that BBC operates in a Western democracy. However, in other cases, linking journalism to democracy can become controversial.

Zelizer (2012) argues that linking journalism to democracy and vice versa is a manifestation of American neoliberal ideals. According to Zelizer (2012), studying journalism through the context of democracy is as it reflects neocolonial ideals of considering whatever Western countries do as the ‘right’ thing, while the rest of the world should adhere and look up
to these western standards, and therefore could be “marginalizing” and “unrepresentative” (Zelizer, 2012, p 469-470).

If journalism in one country does not fulfill the standards of quality from a liberal perspective, it does not necessarily entail that it does not fulfill the needs of the people and democracy in this country. For instance, Trakhtenberg (2005) argues that Russian media was not established to hold those in power accountable but rather act as an intermediary messenger between political leaders and the public. Therefore, arguably, we cannot judge the quality of Russian media based on the role of journalism in a participatory democracy, for example.

However, dismissing democracy all together is somewhat unrealistic, as it dismisses the fact that Western ideals are not only spread in academia, but also to practical journalism. Journalists from non-Western countries receive training and education in Western countries and aspire to fulfill Western standards of journalistic quality. The ideal alternative would be conceptualizing journalistic quality based on the nature of democracy in a given (non-Western) country. Unfortunately, academia is yet to establish a conceptualization of democracy in a non-Western context. Therefore, for this article, I will rather rely on alternative approaches to conceptualize the role of journalism.

Alternatives to (Western)-Democracy?

As an alternative to Strömback’s (2005) models of democracy, which rather apply to Western democracies, Spurk et al. (2010) relied on a rather simple definition of democracy, that of Dahl (1915) in their assessment of journalistic quality in Liberian media. Dahl defines democracy as a system that provides “opportunities for effective participation; voter equality; gaining enlightened understanding; exercising final control over the agenda; inclusion of adults” (Dahl, 1915, p44).
Spurk et al. (2010) developed a set of normative roles through which journalism could contribute to democracy according to this definition, assuming that journalism should mainly engage citizens in a public debate, facilitate a better understanding of current events and present diverse opinions to reflect different voices in society. To translate these roles into an analysis of journalistic quality in Liberian news, their study measures how news is inclusive of different actors and sources to measure diversity, and how the news addressed the reasons rather than lays the facts to create a better understanding of events (Spurk et al., 2010).

The problem the framework of Spurk et al. (2010) is that it is not an entirely ‘alternative’ approach. Dahl’s (1915) definition of democracy is still rather applicable to Western democracies and less so to non-Western ones.

There exist other concepts through which a set of standards to measure journalistic quality can be derived. Such as the existing journalistic characteristics which journalists agree on and consider a necessary foundation of their profession, including journalistic ethics, freedom, and independence, serving the public interest and objectivity (Shapiro, 2010). The characteristics Shapiro (2010) suggested are, however, subject to criticism, for being vague and subjective. Public interest is often used as a justification for actions by individuals’ perception and understanding of what is best for an entire population (McQuail, 1992) and is particularly contested in post-colonial states that encompass racial, ethnic and socio-economic conflicts (Rodny-Gumede, 2017). Some scholars even suggest that we should avoid using the term ‘public interest’ altogether (Held, 1970).

Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) developed a framework to study the role of journalism without focusing on the model of democracy in which it operates, but instead focusing on journalism’s identity in the political life in a given society. They listed seven different functions of journalism. Out of the seven functions Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) established, the two most relevant
functions to this article are what they describe as a critical monitorial function, and a collaborative-facilitative function.

Within the critical monitorial function, journalists are either passively reporting on issues when they’re made available, investigating and providing verification to news or providing explicit critique in their articles. This reflects the most basic journalistic identity in Western democracies, where journalists act as a ‘watchdog’ to hold those in power accountable (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2016).

On the other hand, the collaborative-facilitative function of journalism is reflected in content which emphasizes unity and nation building, or defends the actions of the government, and the maximum degree of this function is working as a mouthpiece between the people and the government (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). The limitation to this framework, however, is that it is rather an exploratory approach, as non-Western democracies have not been scientifically established, thus, one has to explore to what extent could they be in line with Hanitzsch and Vos’ (2016) framework.

In conclusion, rather than sticking to Western approaches to evaluate journalistic qualities, one could conceptualize standards of journalistic quality based on the role of media that journalists agree on. For this study of journalistic quality Sudanese local and exile media, I will primarily rely on journalists’ role perception to conceptualize journalistic quality within a Sudanese media landscape.

**Media in Sudan**

Postcolonial states in Africa were either under military rule or one-party rule, during which freedoms were limited, and the only operating media were state-owned/run televisions and radios (Mukhongo, 2010). Although the continent witnessed a movement of liberalization in the early 1990s, the media remained under control of certain parties in society. For instance, in
Nigeria, and the press took the side of the parties or tribes which sponsored them (Mukhongo, 2010).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the press in Sudan was established and dominated by the Greeks, Britons, Egyptians, and Lebanese, and was thus mostly consumed by the society’s elite (Sharkey, 1999). After Sudan gained its independence, in 1955, newspapers were circulated among wider segments of the public, and its primary role was disseminating nationalist ideas and developing an Arabic identity in Sudan. This meant the exclusion of non-Muslims from the overall societal representation in the news (Sharkey, 1999), thus, diversity was not part of the Sudanese journalistic content. It also reflects how the role of journalism in Sudan was similar to what Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) coined as a collaborative-facilitative function, in which the media acts as partners and supporters of the government.

The strong state control over the media in Africa resulted in censorship and limited press freedom, which “placed media workers at the forefront of civil society struggles for autonomy from government control” (Mukhongo, 2010, p 344). Thus, media workers are fighting to produce better journalistic quality. However, their success, or failure, is yet to be assessed.

Oppression of the press, as well as political instability, resulted in the emergence of exile journalism when journalists flee their countries due to circumstances that hinder their work and live and work from a safer country (Nordahl, 2012).

Exile journalism remains an under-researched phenomenon. The only existing research conducted on exile journalism was concerned with the Burmese in exile news outlet the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), which is considered to be contributing to civic engagement, particularly, and democracy, generally in Burma (Pidduck, 2010).

The term ‘exile journalism’ has been only implicitly defined in previous research. Nordahl (2012) defines exile journalism as “media groups are unable to operate in their home
country, for political reasons. They, therefore, have to move the operations to another country in order to continue the work – countries with potentially fundamentally different media philosophies” (Nordahl, 2012, p. 59).

Furthermore, Pidduck (2010) conceptualized exile journalism as a form of transnational media (Pidduck 2010), given its transnational nature of production and broadcasting, which transcends borders. However, it cannot be studied as one, due to its fundamental differences compared to mainstream forms of transnational media. Naficy (1993) addresses the main difference between mainstream transnational media and diaspora/exile media, as he defines transnational media as ‘centralized global broadcasting’ while describing diaspora and exile media as ‘decentralized narrow broadcasting’ (Naficy, 1993, p. 31), as the audience of both differs. Moreover, one cannot consider, for example, the Burmese DVB as the same type of transnational media as CNN, given the political circumstances that led journalists to seek exile and the different economic circumstances in which DVB and CNN perform.

**Conceptualizing Journalistic Quality**

To better understand the role of journalists, how they view their own role could serve as a guide (Shapiro, 2010). In Muslim majority countries, including Sudan, journalists identified four normative roles for journalism: truth-telling, educating the public, mediating in conflict, and prioritizing public interest (Muchtar et al., 2017). The first two standards are in line with McQuail’s (1998) elements of factuality: truth, and information. The other two standards will not be considered in this study due to their challenging operationalization, particularly in the context of conducting a content analysis. As discussed earlier, the term ‘public interest’ is limiting and subjective, and rather than assessing the mediating role of journalism in conflict, this research will instead assess journalistic quality and the relationship between media and political power.
Furthermore, journalists in countries with political instability expressed how they try to give voice to the people and mobilize their political interests (Muchtar et al., 2017). This role could be measured under criterion of diversity (Hoffman-Riem, 1987; McQuail, 1998; Mukhongo, 2010).

On the other hand, the study by Nordahl (2012), exile journalists also expressed in interviews how they viewed their normative roles, which entail source diversity in articles, trustworthiness, independence from those in power and balancing criticism (p. 103). Therefore, based on the discussed literature, this article defines journalistic quality as the extent to which journalistic content fulfils four main criteria: diversity, factuality, comprehensiveness, and criticism. Factuality refers to the truth element in McQuail’s (2005) conceptualization, and comprehensiveness refers to the element of information.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The political and economic circumstances that both local and exile media face impose limitations on journalistic quality. For instance, source diversity is difficult to achieve under strict government control, as the government acts as the main source and actor in news (Mukhongo, 2010).

Studies have shown that state owned media in Africa has an overall lower quality than independent media. In their study on journalistic quality in Liberian news, Spurk et al. (2010) found that the state owned media outlet they studied had the lowest score of source diversity among three other Liberian media outlets. They also found that the state owned outlet had the lowest score of attributing facts to sources (Spurk et al, 2010).

Sources are also a limitation for exile journalism. Exile journalists reported that because the state put a ‘red mark’ on them, they are denied access to enter their country, which affects their access to local sources and relationship to existing sources, as communicating with exile
journalists from inside the country poses a threat to these sources, not to mention how impossible it is for them to access official sources (Nordahl, 2012).

Based on this knowledge, I formulate the following hypotheses to (partly) answer the research question **RQ1: How does journalistic quality differ in Sudanese exile and local media?**

H1: Sudanese local and exile media have low rates of source diversity

H2: Sudanese local and exile media have low rates of source attribution

Another study by Spurk et al. (2007) on Zambian news found that the state owned Zambian radio station, in comparison to independent radio stations, was less likely to include complete facts and comprehensives information, the two elements relevant to McQuail’s (1998) *factuality*.

H3: Sudanese state owned media has low rates of comprehensiveness

H4: Sudanese state owned media has lower rates of completeness

Perhaps the main difference between exile journalism and national/local journalism is the level of freedom under which they both operate. The audience expects that independence of media results in a more diverse, fair, and transparent coverage (McQuail, 1992). But does this entail that this level of freedom results in better journalistic quality?

McQuail (2005) considered freedom as an element of journalistic quality, arguing that it could be measured through the extent to which content includes a critical viewpoint. Therefore, I explore the question **RQ2: To what extent is Sudanese media critical to Sudanese political power?**

**Method**

Since this research is a comparative study of news texts, content analysis is the most suitable method to answer the research question imposed in this paper, as it is a systematic
analysis commonly used to study mass media texts (Bryman, 2004). To analyze the difference of journalistic quality in Sudanese news media I conducted a quantitative content analysis of four Sudanese online news media outlets: two are operating from Europe, and two are operating inside Sudan.

Internet penetration in Sudan is only around 28% of the population, because of economic reasons (“Sudan”, 2019), thus online news is not the most accessible media to the whole public. But due to limitations on acquiring archives of other formats (such as radio programs), this study focuses on online news outlets, which is not too different from print news, as research has found that online journalism is more or less similar to standardized offline journalism (Quandt, 2008). It is still, however, important to recognize the possibilities that the internet offers to journalism. For instance, online news making has less editorial restrictions than traditional news, including length, diversity of journalistic formats and accessibility (Sjøvaag & Stavelin, 2012). And in the case of Sudan, journalists have gone online to avoid the strict measures of government censorship on print and other traditional formats of media (Afp, 2017).

Therefore, I conducted the content analysis on the four following news websites: Radio Dabanga, Sudan Tribune, Al Taghyeer and the Sudanese Media Center (SMC). In this study, exile media refers to the media outlets operating from Europe, and local media refers to media outlets operating from Sudan.

The first two outlets are exile media. Radio Dabanga, describes itself as an exile outlet based in the Netherlands and the coverage is done by Sudanese journalists. Radio Dabanga, as the name implies, is primarily a Radio station. However, due to lack of accessibility to archives of similar broadcast outlets (radio), I chose to analyze the online news in text format on the website of Radio Dabanga (“About us”, n.d.). The second Europe-based outlet is Sudan Tribune.
Operating from Paris, France, Sudan Tribune is a non-profit online news outlet run by a group of Sudanese and non-Sudanese reporters.

For local Sudanese media outlets, I chose two with different ideological orientations, to find whether there is difference in journalistic quality between independent (Al Taghyeer) and state affiliated (SMC) media in Sudan, and if all (online) media in Sudan is under strict state control. The first one, Al Taghyeer, was founded in 2013 by a group of journalists who were not able to freely perform traditional journalism, thus chose to go online (“Sudan”, 2018). The last outlet is the Sudanese Media Center (SMC), an online news outlet affiliated to the Sudanese State, particularly the National Intelligence and Security Services (“Agency”, n.d.), although the website does not explicitly state any affiliation to the Sudanese government, it does, however, state that it was founded by an initiative aiming to provide quality news reporting online through different formats of analysis reports and investigations (“About us – The Sudanese Media Center”, n.d.).

Sampling

Due to the absence of full archives of the selected news outlets on archive sources (i.e. Lexus Nexus, etc.), the sampling process was conducted through an advanced Google search of Arabic news articles of the four websites, I did not specify keywords because part of the analysis is to check for diversity of topics, but rather conducted the search based on the websites addresses within the time frame August 19, 2018 to April 19, as it highlights five months before and five months during which protests took place in Sudan, and thus were packed with events to cover. Through a systematic random sampling, I selected every fourth article appearing in the search results. The sample excluded articles which contained video materials.

The final sample was comprised of 300 articles (SMC: n = 96, Al Taghyeer: n = 65, Sudan Tribune: n = 78, Radio Dabanga: n = 61).
Operationalization

Diversity

For the first criterion, diversity, I measured it through four variables: topics, journalistic formats, sources and opinions. Diversity of topics is measured through the following categories: politics, international events, legal issues, social development issues, events, economics, culture, religion, media and science (Spurk et al., 2007), and demonstrations/strikes. Results for this variable indicate the extent to which a news outlet provides a range of facts to its audience through different topics.

Diversity of journalistic formats is measured similarly. The categories of journalistic formats are news story, in depth analysis, opinion article, and interview. The analysis run on this variable indicates the extent to which media outlets can potentially provide their audience with a better understanding of a given issue through addressing issues in different formats (Hoffman-Riem, 1987).

Thirdly, to measure diversity of sources, I created a matrix of 23 different types of sources (see appendix). Sources are selected if there is a direct attribution to them, for instance, through the use of terms such as ‘according to’, ‘X said’, etc. I later created a variable with the sum of different sources in one article, thus it becomes a continuous variable, in which numbers indicate the extent to which there is greater or smaller diversity of sources. The higher the value in each article, the higher the diversity of sources it includes. The interpretation of the results of this variable indicate the extent to which a media outlet gives voice to different actors in society and thus is likely to contribute to a better public discussion.

Finally, I measure diversity of opinions. If the article includes two or more different opinions, opinion diversity is coded as being present. In case of no opinion being expressed, or just one opinion, opinion diversity is coded as not present. Analysis on this variable indicates
how a media outlet is inclusive of different opinions, and again, is likely to contribute to a better public discussion.

**Factuality**

I measure through three variables: *evidence*, *attribution*, and *completeness*. Evidence and attribution are measured through two similar scales. *Evidence* is defined as information that allows for the public to check and validate the accuracy of a given fact. *Attribution* is the amount of facts in an article that are directly attributed to a source. Facts are information that does not imply opinion, including but not limited to: names, times, ages, places, dates, etc. Attribution is, for example, the presence of phrases such as "according to", "said X", "explained", "added", etc. Anonymous sources are considered an explicit attribution. The measurement of these two variable are two scales that indicate the percentage of facts that are backed by evidence or attributed to a source (see appendix). High scores on these two scales indicate how checkable the information is, thus how likely it is to be true. This then fulfills the truth-telling function of journalism (Muchtar et al., 2017).

The last variable measuring factuality is *completeness*, which I measure based on whether or not the article answers the journalistic 5Ws and H (why, when, where, what, who and how). For each of these it is coded as these are being addressed or not, so these variables are coded as either present (1) or absent (0).

**Comprehensiveness**

The third criterion of quality, *comprehensiveness*, is comprised of three variables: *presence of background information*, *presence of implications* arising from the main event, and *presence of connectedness* of different actors and issues. The three variables are measured through three similar scales that measure the extent to which they are present (see appendix). The
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higher a media outlet scores on comprehensiveness, the more it is likely to provide its audience with a better understanding of events.

**Criticism**

The last criterion of quality, *criticism*, is measured on two levels: *criticism against the state*, and *siding with the state*. The first level includes two variables, implicit criticism, which is reported criticism, and explicit criticism, which is a direct criticism by the journalist. Secondly, three variables measure siding with the state: emphasis on nation building, emphasis on preserving unity among the Sudanese people and providing explanations to government decisions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). The five variables of the criticism criterion are measured through a scale that provides the extent to which the variable is present or not in the news text (see appendix). If a media outlet criticizes the state, it is more likely to act as better inform the citizens to be better represented in politics (Althaus, 2012). On the other hand, if the media outlet sides with the government, it is less likely to hold the power accountable, and thus shows lower journalistic quality.

**Coding and Reliability**

Based on the operationalization of concepts, I developed a codebook (see appendix) to code my sample of news texts. To perform Krippendorff’s alpha inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff, 2004), an external coder coded 30 randomly selected articles (10% of the sample). To measure the diversity of sources, the codesheet included a matrix in which the coder can select (multiple) different types of sources (Spurk et al., 2007) (Ka = .81). To measure topic diversity, coders chose one topic from a list of different topics (Ka = .61), as well as choosing one journalistic format (Ka = 1.0)
Furthermore, I included questions that checked for whether an article included two or more different opinions on the same subject (Ka = 1.0), to measure opinion diversity, and whether or not an article had a wider range of facts (Ka = .63).

To measure trustworthiness, I formulated two scales to measure the extent to which the facts in an article were a) attributed to sources (Ka = .69); and b) backed by evidence (Ka = .66). I also formulated scales to measure the extent to which an article fulfilled the comprehensiveness criterion through including background information (Ka = .55), implications of events (Ka = .76), connectedness of different actors and issues (Ka = .85). Similar scales to measure the levels of reported criticism (Ka = .72) and explicit criticism (Ka = .51) criticism against the government in Sudan were included. The codebook also included three questions that identify if the outlet sides with the state, through the extent to which an article includes: emphasis on nation building (Ka = .80) and preserving unity among the people (Ka = .5) and explains political decisions (Ka = .65). The current study is, to my knowledge, the first to operationalize journalistic quality in this way and by means of a media content analysis, all measures have been developed for the purpose of this study specifically. Overall, intercoder reliability showed to be satisfactory, where necessary findings will be interpreted with the appropriate caution.

Results

Diversity

As the first research question investigates how journalistic quality differs in Sudanese exile and local media, the first hypothesis suggested that both local and exile outlets have low source diversity.

To test for the levels of diversity across the outlets inside and outside of Sudan, I first recoded the media outlet variable so that the outlets outside of Sudan, Sudan Tribune and Radio Dabanga, are combined, and the outlets inside Sudan, Al Taghyeer and SMC, are combined.
A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant relation between outlet location (inside or outside Sudan) and diversity of sources used in each article, \( F(1, 298) = 9.47, p = .002 \). In fact, outlets outside Sudan had higher mean scores of source diversity, \( M = 1.08, SD = 0.77 \) than outlets inside Sudan \( M = 0.83, SD = 0.65 \). Therefore, one can conclude that outlets based outside Sudan have higher diversity of sources in their coverage than outlets based in Sudan. This result is contrary to my expectation (H1), that both groups of outlets would not differ in low scores of source diversity.¹

To further explore difference between exile and local media in terms of diversity, testing for diversity of journalistic formats, a chi square test showed a significant difference between exile and local outlets, \( X^2 (3, N = 300) = 22.25, p > .01 \). Exile media only had news stories and opinion articles, while the outlets inside of Sudan had more diversity, as 11.18% of the sample was in-depth analysis and 3.72% were interview articles. Therefore, outlets inside Sudan had higher levels of diversity in journalistic formats.

On the other hand, there was no significant difference between outlets in terms of diversity of reported topics \( X^2 (9, N=300) = 11.32, p > .01 \).

Another chi square test indicated a significant difference between local and exile media in terms of opinion diversity within articles \( X^2 (1, N=300) = 11.79, p < .01 \). Exile media were more likely to report diverse opinions within the same article than local media, as 15.10% of articles by exile media included two or more different opinions, compared to 3.7% of articles in local media.²

In summary, the results were contrary to the expectation that exile and local outlets would have similarly low source diversity (H1), and instead showed that exile outlets have higher source diversity. Furthermore, the results explored the differences in diversity between

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¹ Another ANOVA on the four outlets separately showed similar findings and significant differences between the two outlets inside Sudan and the two outlets outside Sudan.
² A chi square test on the four outlets uncombined showed similar results.
local and exile media, as local media were more likely to have diversity in journalistic format, while exile outlets showed more opinion diversity within the same article. The findings suggest that exile media have an overall higher score of diversity in comparison to local media.

**Comprehensiveness**

To explore overall comprehensiveness among exile and local media, I computed the three following variables: presence of background information, presence of implications arising from the main event and presence of connectedness of different actors and issues. However, results should be interpreted with caution as the scale reliability of the three variables combined was rather low (a = .61).

A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between Sudanese exile and local media in terms of presence of comprehensiveness in coverage (F (1, 298) = 19.58, p = .000), as exile outlets were more likely to have comprehensive coverage (M = 7.97, SD = 2.14) than outlets inside Sudan (M = 6.78, SD = 2.44).

Furthermore, descriptive statistics of the four studied media outlets confirm the hypothesis (H3) that particularly state affiliated media (SMC) has low levels of comprehensiveness. As SMC had the lowest mean scores of comprehensiveness (M = 6.36, SD = 2.62), compared to Sudan Tribune (M = 8.34, SD = 1.75), Radio Dabanga (M = 7.49, SD = 2.48), and Al Taghyeer (M = 6.36, SD = 2.62).

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3 Three one-way ANOVAs on the variables uncombined indicated similar significance of difference between outlets: 1) Presence of implications: (F (3, 296) = 7.78, p = .00); 2) Presence of background information: (F(3, 296) = 16.19, p = .00); 3) Complexity: (F(3, 296) = 10.28, p = .00).
In summary, Sudanese exile media have higher levels of comprehensiveness compared to Sudanese local media, particularly state affiliated local media.

**Factualness**

To explore the difference in factuality in articles across outlets, I ran a chi square test to assess fact completeness based on the presence (and absence) of the journalistic 5Ws and H – whether the article answers the five questions: when, where, what, who, why and how. The chi-square test showed a significant difference between exile and local outlets in terms of fact completeness, $X^2 (2, N=300) = 14.62, p < .01$, as 80.57% of articles by exile outlets had complete facts, while in comparison only 60.24% of articles by local outlets had complete facts.

Descriptive statistics confirm the hypothesis (H4) that state affiliated media in particular has low score of fact completeness, as the state affiliated SMC had complete facts in 54.16%, compared to 87.17% of the articles by Sudan Tribune, 72.13%, of articles by Radio Dabanga and 69.23% of articles by Al Taghyeer.

To measure the levels of trustworthiness through directly attributing facts to sources and backing facts with evidence, I ran two separate one-way ANOVAs as the two variables could not be combined due to a low scale reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .21).

The first ANOVA indicated non-significant difference between exile and local outlets in terms of degree of source attribution, $F(1, 298) = .75, p = .386$, as exile outlets had a close score of source attribution ($M = 2.46, SD = .95$) compared to local outlets ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.11$). This confirms H3, exile and local outlets have similarly low scores of using sources.

Finally, the second ANOVA indicated a significant difference between exile and local outlets in backing up facts with evidence ($F (1, 297) = 5.23, p = .023$), as local outlets were more likely to include evidence backing up facts ($M = 2.75, SD = .94$) than exile outlets ($M = 2.49, SD = 1.0$).
**Criticism**

A one-way ANOVA indicated that there was a significant difference between exile and local outlets in reporting on criticism against the Sudanese government \( F(1, 298) = 12.59, p = .00 \).

Another one-way ANOVA indicated similar significant differences between the four outlets uncombined. The significance is particularly due to the state affiliated outlet, SMC, lower score of reported criticism (M=1.05, SD = .36) compared to the three other outlets: Radio Dabanga (M =1.93, SD = 1.07), Al Taghyeer (M=1.83, SD = 1.24), Sudan Tribune (M=1.65, SD = 1.07).

Another one-way ANOVA also indicated a significant difference between the four outlets in explicit criticism \( F(3, 296) = 10.15, p = .00 \). Radio Dabanga also showed the highest mean score of explicit criticism (M = 1.48, SD = .92), followed by the opposition outlet Al Taghyeer (M = 1.43, SD = .88). The case standing out in these two analyses was SMC, as the tests indicated that it was significantly different to the three other outlets in criticism levels, while there was no significant difference between the three other outlets.

In summary, this section explored levels of criticism, and to what extent exile outlets could fulfill a watchdog role. They indeed do, however, not exclusively. Al Taghyeer, although operating inside Sudan, had high rates of criticism against political power.

On the other hand, I tested for whether outlets implicitly supported the state. One-way ANOVAs indicated no significant difference between exile and local outlets in terms of including emphasis on preserving unity among the people \( F(1, 298) = 1.18, p = .277 \), as well as emphasis on nation building \( F(1, 298) = 2.21, p = .138 \).

However, a one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between exile and local outlets
outlets in including an emphasis on preserving unity among Sudanese people in articles \((F(3, 296) = 1.94, p = .37)\), as local outlets are more likely to report on emphasis on preserving unity among the people \((M = 1.58, SD = 1.08)\) than exile outlets \((M = 1.01, SD = .12)\). Another one-way ANOVA on the four outlets uncombined showed where exactly the significant difference occurred: SMC. The state-affiliated outlet was more likely to include explanations to government decisions, \((M = 1.95, SD = 1.24)\), in comparison to Al Taghyeer \((M = 1.5, SD = .37)\), Radio Dabanga \((M = 1.00, SD = .00)\) and Sudan Tribune \((M = 1.03, SD = .15)\).

These results explore the answer to the second research question in this article: **RQ2: To what extent is Sudanese media critical to Sudanese political power?**

The findings suggest that exile media have higher levels of criticism, as well as the independent local media outlet. On the other hand, the state affiliated SMC had lower levels of criticism and acted as a mouthpiece for the government.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study explored the difference in *journalistic quality* of news published by exile and local Sudanese online news outlets, as well as the difference between them in relation to political power. This is done through a content analysis of two local Sudanese news outlets based in Khartoum, Al Taghyeer and SMC, and two exile outlets based in Europe, Sudan Tribune and Radio Dabanga. Findings suggest that Sudanese exile media have overall higher journalistic quality than local media.

The main research question was how journalistic quality in Sudanese local and exile outlets. The answer to this question was partly investigative, and partly exploratory, due to lack of prior research on the precise subject.

The conceptualization of journalistic quality was a challenge, given how existing literature on journalistic quality is rather concerned with Western standards. Thus, I
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conceptualized *quality* as the extent to which content fulfils the standards local and exile journalists perceive as their role in society. Therefore, Journalistic quality was defined as the extent to which outlets fulfill the following four criteria: diversity, factuality, comprehensiveness and criticism.

Firstly, diversity was measured through diversity of sources, formats, topics and opinions. Exile outlets had overall higher diversity of sources and opinions, the two elements which scholars consider the core of content diversity (Masini & Aelst, 2017). These results partly correspond to prior research on exile journalism, as Nordahl (2009) reported that exile journalists prioritized diversity opinion in their work. On the other hand, the source diversity result is striking, as Nordahl (2009) also reported that exile journalists faced the challenge of accessing sources, thus, source diversity and attribution was a limitation to exile journalism.

The findings on source diversity also indicate how little attention local Sudanese media give to source diversity. This also corresponds with prior research that suggests that state controlled media are less likely to have diversity in content, in comparison to independent media (Spurk et al., 2010). And could perhaps be explained by the strong government control and imposed censorship, that some opinions are simply ‘not allowed’ to be voiced (Mukhongo, 2010).

There was no significant difference between local and exile media in terms of diversity of reported topics. However, findings indicate significant differences between the two in terms of diversity of journalistic formats, as local outlets were more likely to produce interviews and in-depth analysis, rather than stick to news stories and opinion articles. This could be attributed to the access to sources that local journalists have and the geographical boundary that exile journalists have (Nordahl, 2009), that allows local journalists to conduct long form interviews and conduct other long form pieces.
Secondly, factuality was measured through source attribution, presence of evidence of facts and completeness of facts. I expected that both local and exile media would have low scores of source attribution. Exile media, however, was more likely attribute facts to sources than local media. The low levels of source attribution in local media also corresponds to prior research (Spurk et al., 2010). There was no significant difference between the two in terms of backing facts with evidence.

However, Exile media also scored significantly higher in fact completeness, corresponding with my expectation that the state affiliated outlet would have lower rates of completeness. Thus, exile media had an overall higher quality in terms of factuality.

Thirdly, comprehensiveness was also significantly more evident in exile media, as the two outlets include more background information in their coverage, implications of events and connectedness of different actors and events. This confirms my hypothesis, that particularly state affiliated media, would have lower rates of comprehensiveness. This also corresponds to literature on measuring journalistic quality in Africa, as shown by Spurk et al. (2010) that state owned media had overall lower journalistic quality than independent media, particularly in terms of completeness and comprehensiveness.

This study also explored the difference between local and exile outlets in terms levels of criticism as a journalistic quality. Criticism was higher in exile media than in local media, indicating that they indeed fulfil the watchdog function of journalism (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). This is in line with the media landscape in which exile outlets work. Although they report on and to Sudan, exile journalists live in a freer media landscape (Nordahl, 2009), and in this case, a Western one, where the role of journalism is to act as a watchdog and hold the media accountable (Strömbäck, 2005).
On the other hand, local Sudanese media focused more on explaining the state’s decisions and policies, confirming H5, fulfilling a mouthpiece to the government function (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016), likely a result of state control over media (Mukhongo, 2010).

An interesting finding was that the Khartoum based outlet, Al Taghyeer, scored high in both criticism and explaining government’s decisions. Perhaps expressing a watchdog function of journalism while practicing self-censorship to survive the oppressive atmosphere (Jungblut & Hoxha, 2016). Al Taghyeer had overall higher scores than the state affiliated outlet SMC, and in some cases, even higher than the Netherlands-based Radio Dabanga. This particular finding could be attributed to the fact that journalists went online to be able to evade censorship and practice ‘better’ journalism (Hume, 2004) and that journalistic quality is not exclusive to Western media landscapes.

Nonetheless, there are of course also limitations to this study. The methodological nature of content analysis imposes strict standards of quantifying concepts is what some scholars consider a disadvantage, as it could result in an ‘atheoretical’ study, where the researcher focuses more on feasibly measurable concepts rather than theoretically relevant concepts (Bryman, 2004, p. 197). This could be avoided in future research by mixing a quantitative with a qualitative methods approach, particularly when exploring an under-researched phenomenon like exile journalism. One approach could be a quantitative content analysis accompanied by contextualization through qualitative interviews with exile and local journalists.

The extent to which this study is generalizable is also questionable, given that I deliberately operationalized journalistic quality to fit the case of Sudan. Another limitation is the selection method, which would result in a better sample if it was done through an academic archival platform, rather than an advanced google search, which I was inclined to conduct due to lack of availability or access to archival materials.
However, these limitations notwithstanding, this study highlights how the conditions of independence and press freedom, in which exile journalism performs, can contribute to better journalistic quality. This study also contributes to the bigger discussion on operationalizing journalistic quality in non-Western democracies.

Democracy is not a universal concept, different culture and historical backgrounds contribute to the formation of different perceptions of democracy. Relying on a Western framework of analysis in a non-Western context is therefore inaccurate (Koelble & Lipuma, 2008). Through this study, I suggested that we overcome this obstacle by relying on the perspectives of journalists who produce the content we analyze, that perhaps could offer a more nuanced approach to improve journalism in countries with complex political and media landscapes.

References


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doi:10.1386/jams.2.2.173_1
WHERE FREEDOM EXISTS, QUALITY EXISTS?


doi:10.1080/15705850508438918


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Appendix

Codebook

Q1: Coder ID:

Q2: Article ID:

Q3: News Outlet:

1 = Radio Dabanga

2 = Al Taghyeer

3 = SMC
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4 = Sudan Tribune

**Q4: Date of publication**

1 = Before the protests (before 19th Dec. 2018)
2 = During the protests (after or on 19th Dec. 2018)

**Q5: What is the journalistic format of the article?**

1 = News story
2 = Opinion article
3 = In-depth analysis
4 = Interview (coded with the presence of explicit questions by the interviewer (journalist) and answers by the interviewee (source))
5 = Unclear
6 = Other (please specify)

Note: Opinion article is coded if the title includes ‘opinion’, ‘editorial’ or other terms which explicitly state the presence of opinion.

Note: In-depth analysis is coded if the text is a long form factual piece, which does not include implicit opinions by the author of the article.

**Q6: What is the main topic of the article?**

1 = Politics (Political reform, elections, national security, conflict resolution, foreign affairs)
2 = International events (War, terrorist attacks OR main event takes place outside of Sudan)
3 = Legal/Law issues (anti-corruption, legal cases)
4 = Social development issues (Education, Health, Environment, Social problems, Child defilement, Water, Migration/ Refugees)
5 = Events (Accidents/ Crime, Celebrities, Sports)
6 = Demonstrations/ Strikes
WHERE FREEDOM EXISTS, QUALITY EXISTS?

7 = Economics (Finances, Industry/ Business, Infrastructure, Agriculture, Development, co-operation, Regional integration, general economy)

8 = Culture/Lifestyle

9 = Religion

10 = Science

11 = Other (please specify)

Note: topic is determined based on the profession of the main actors mentioned in the article (e.g.: politicians, protestors, athletes, celebrities, NGOs, social initiatives, etc) and the main activity they’re involved in.

**Q7: Who is the *main* source in the article?**

*the main source is determined based on presence in 50% or more of the total number of paragraphs in a given article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>present but not the main source (1)</th>
<th>the main source (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President (Al Bashir) (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestors (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorities (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Military (5)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Police/Security (6)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruling party (7)</td>
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<td>Opposition party (8)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other political parties (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q8: Does the story include two or more different opinions on the same subject?

1 = Yes

2 = No
0 = Unclear

**Q9: Does the article answer the journalistic 5Ws+ H?**

1 = Yes

2 = No

3 = Unclear

Note: The 5Ws and H are: why, when, where, what, who and how.

**Q10: How many of the facts are explicitly attributed to a source?**

0 = None of the facts

1 = Some of the facts (less than 50%, more than 0%)

2 = Most of the facts (more than 50%)

3 = All of the facts (100%)

99 = Unclear

Note: facts are information that does not imply opinion. Facts include but are not limited to: names, times, ages, places, dates, etc.

Note: attribution is, for example, the presence of "according to", "said X", "explained", "added", etc.

Note: Anonymous sources are considered an explicit attribution

**Q11: How many of the facts are backed by evidence?**

0 = None of the facts

1 = Some of the facts (less than 50%, more than 0%)

2 = Most of the facts (more than 50%)

3 = All of the facts (100%)

99 = Unclear
Note: evidence is information that allow for the public to check and validate the accuracy of a given fact.

**Q12: Does the story include key implications/consequences arising from the story?**

0 = Not present

1 = present once in passing, not the main topic of the article

2 = present more than once but less than 50% of the total count of the paragraphs

3 = present in at least 50% + 1 of the total number of paragraphs

99 = Unclear

**Q13: Does the article include background information on the main event?**

0 = Not present

1 = present once in passing, not the main topic of the article

2 = present more than once but less than 50% of the total count of the paragraphs

3 = present in at least 50% + 1 of the total number of paragraphs

99 = Unclear

**Q14: Does the article include connectedness of different actors/issues in the same story?**

0 = Not present

1 = present once in passing, not the main topic of the article

2 = present more than once but less than 50% of the total count of the paragraphs

3 = present in at least 50% + 1 of the total number of paragraphs

99 = Unclear

**Q15: Does the article include reported criticism against the government (quoted or attributed)?**

0 = Not present

1 = present once in passing, not the main topic of the article
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2 = present more than once but less than 50% of the total count of the paragraphs
3 = present in at least 50% + 1 of the total number of paragraphs
99 = Unclear

Q16: Does the article include *explicit criticism against the government?*

*not quoted or attributed but rather the reporter's own criticism.

0 = Not present
1 = present once in passing, not the main topic of the article
2 = present more than once but less than 50% of the total count of the paragraphs
3 = present in at least 50% + 1 of the total number of paragraphs
99 = Unclear

Q17: Does the article include emphasis on preserving unity among the Sudanese people?

0 = Not present
1 = present once in passing, not the main topic of the article
2 = present more than once but less than 50% of the total count of the paragraphs
3 = present in at least 50% + 1 of the total number of paragraphs
99 = Unclear

Q18: Does the article include emphasis on nation building?

0 = Not present
1 = present once in passing, not the main topic of the article
2 = present more than once but less than 50% of the total count of the paragraphs
3 = present in at least 50% + 1 of the total number of paragraphs
99 = Unclear

Q19: Does the article include explanations to government decisions?

0 = Not present
WHERE FREEDOM EXISTS, QUALITY EXISTS?

1 = present once in passing, not the main topic of the article

2 = present more than once but less than 50% of the total count of the paragraphs

3 = present in at least 50% + 1 of the total number of paragraphs

99 = Unclear